

Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 1 September 2020

Wards: All

Subject: Performance Monitoring of Parks, Cemeteries and Grounds Maintenance

Lead officer: Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration.

Lead member: Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture.

Contact officer: Doug Napier, Greenspaces Manager.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A) Members are requested to note the contents of this report and provide officers with any comments or observations regarding their experiences or any reports that they have received from Merton residents relating to the delivery of the grounds maintenance services by *idverde*.
 - B) Members note the application and professionalism demonstrated by the *idverde* and its staff in the delivery of critical and much-valued services to Merton and its communities during the unprecedented times and the extraordinary demands imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides Members of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel with an update on the recent performance of the incumbent contractor, *idverde*, in relation to the delivery of the grounds maintenance aspects (Lot 2) of the South London Waste Partnership (SLWP) Phase C contract. It is the second such review of the performance of this contract, the first having occurred at the meeting of the Panel on 1 November 2018.
- 1.2 The service wishes to place on record our gratitude for the support offered by *idverde* and its staff in dealing with the unprecedented challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. Critical services, such as burial services, for example, continued to be delivered at levels significantly above the normal demands and the borough's parks and open spaces provided important health and well-being opportunities for residents in remarkable numbers, at a time when most other leisure and recreational opportunities were denied to them.

2. DETAILS

2.1 The Lot 2 element of the SLWP contract commenced on 1st February 2017, following a two-year procurement exercise that included the London Borough of Sutton jointly as a delivery partner. The successful bidder was *idverde* Limited, who began the procurement process under a previous company trading name, The Landscape Group Limited. The range and scope of the Lot 2 contract was developed during the course of the procurement and the final form of the contract, initially for a period of 8 years, but with the possibility to extend to up to 24 years, included the following services:

- Horticultural services - including grass cutting and the management of hedges, herbaceous borders, highway verges, annual bedding & floral displays, rose and shrub beds, flowering meadows, green roof & green walls, allotments (including administration functions), war memorials & memorial gardens.
- Sports pitch services - including tennis courts, rugby, football & cricket pitches and bowling greens.
- Play & leisure services - including children's playgrounds, water play facilities, outdoor gyms, ball courts, wheel parks, etc.
- Cleansing & general maintenance services - including litter, graffiti & leaf clearance, sweeping of paths & other hard surfaces, cleaning of pavilions & toilets, water features, gullies & drains, etc.
- Events services - providing support & infrastructure (e.g. vehicles, plant & equipment) to support events as required.
- Cemeteries services - an integrated service that includes grave digging & interments, grounds & memorial management, waste & litter management and service administration.
- Nature conservation services - relevant works that forms part of the routine maintenance of parks and open spaces and *ad hoc* works on nature reserves.
- Ad hoc asset and project services - site and asset development works as requested by the client.

2.2 The current annual budget for the delivery of the *idverde* service in the current financial year (2020/21) is £1,083k, which is net of income.

2.3 This report provides comparative performance details and data from the commencement of the contract on the 1st February 2017, but focuses in particular on the period from 2019 to date, the interval since the contractor's performance was last considered by the Panel on 1 November 2018. It should be noted that this interval covers the period of the Covid-19 national emergency and the lockdown, social distancing and allied measures that the coronavirus pandemic imposed.

3. Contract Management and Monitoring

Performance Quality Management System

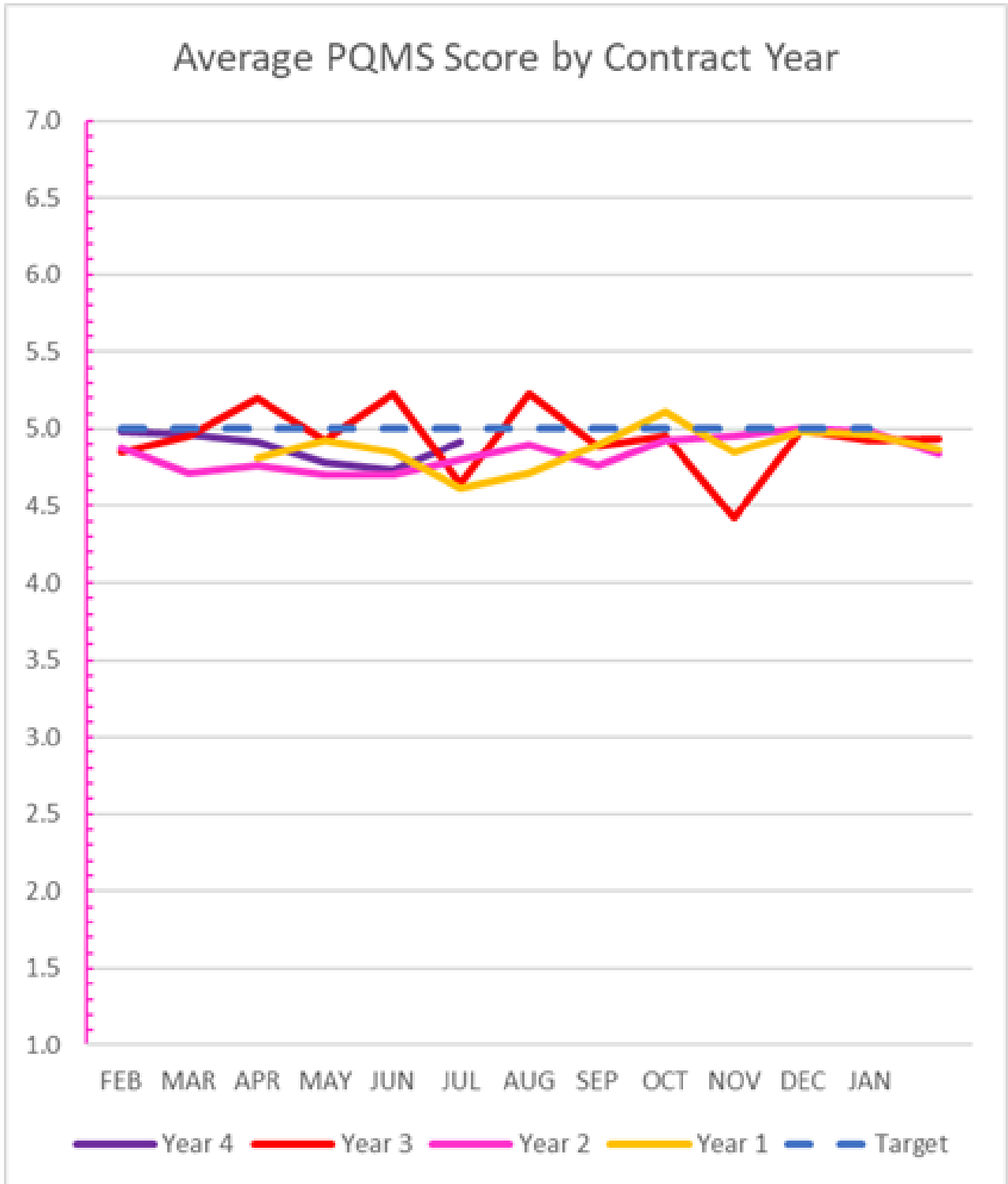
3.1 A mobile telephone Performance Quality Management System (PQMS) app, developed by *idverde* as part of its national portfolio of grounds maintenance contracts, and tailored to suit the needs of the two Lot 2 boroughs during the contract mobilisation phase, was implemented in Merton from April 2017. This represents the

primary tool by which *idverde*'s performance is assessed by Merton Council's client team.

- 3.2 This convenient tool provides client-side officers with the opportunity to assess and score the condition of parks and other open space assets and features in the field on a scale of 1 to 7, where 5 represents the contract standard and 5+ exceeds it (see grading details in Appendix 1). The management system generates sites for formal inspection on a random basis, drawing upon the entire list of open space assets, including parks, cemeteries and highways verges, in order to enable an impartial and balanced perspective on the condition of the contractor's performance overall. The Council's three Neighbourhood Client Officers are pivotal to this quality assessment process and collectively have conducted some 1,900 individual inspections in our parks and open spaces since the commencement of the contract.
- 3.3 Details of the scores achieved by *idverde* since the adoption of the PQMS are detailed below, both numerically and graphically.

IDV PQMS Scores 2017-2020 by Month:

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Av. Score
2017				4.81	4.93	4.85	4.62	4.71	4.90	5.11	4.85	4.98	4.86
2018	4.96	4.88	4.71	4.76	4.70	4.70	4.80	4.90	4.76	4.93	4.95	5.00	4.84
2019	4.98	4.85	4.95	5.20	4.93	5.23	4.64	5.23	4.89	4.95	4.42	4.99	4.94
2020	4.93	4.98	4.96	4.92	4.78	4.73	4.92						4.89

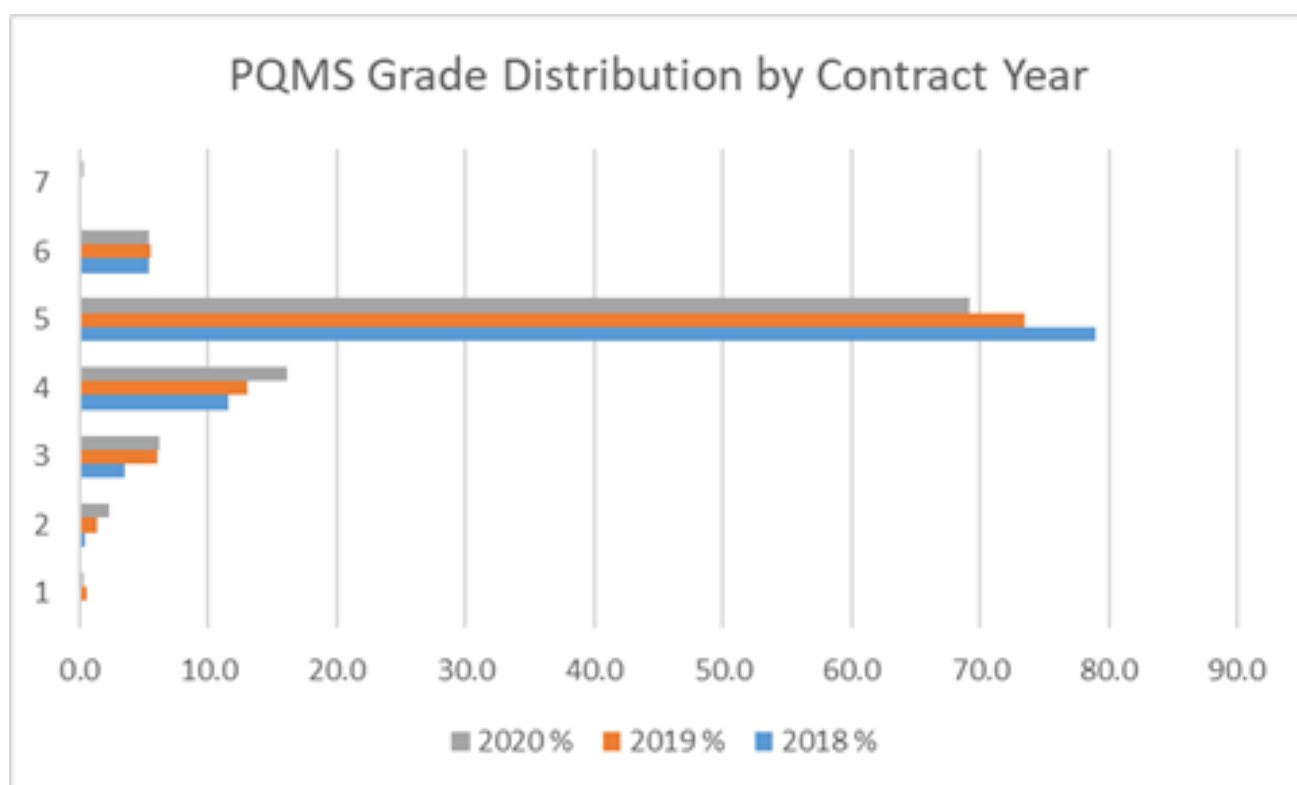


Year 1 - 2017/18
 Year 2 - 2018/19
 Year 3 - 2019/20
 Year 4 - 2020/21 (to July 2020 only)

3.4 The graphic above demonstrates that performance to date, is generally a little below the service specification target of 5, in the range of 4.84 to 4.94 on average per annum.

3.5 Adverse weather conditions and wet ground conditions on and about the peak season for grass growth during the spring-time (April to June) and, in 2020, the operational constraints imposed by Covid-19 compliance measures, including social distancing needs and in order to protect critical services, such as burials, are generally responsible for the lower performance scores.

3.6 The graph below depicts the grade distributions by contract year and illustrates very clearly that the modal PQMS score achieved by *idverde* is 5, and by some margin. The data below is based upon more than 10,000 individual quality scores, with a score of 5 and above being achieved on 84% (2018), 79% (2019) and 75% (2020) of occasions.



3.7 One of the main benefits of the PQMS is that it enables the contract client team to maintain a detailed oversight of the contractor’s performance on a week-by-week basis. Any issues identified through the field inspection assessments are considered and analysed with *idverde*’s Contract Manager and service supervisors at weekly operational meetings with a view to resolving any specific problems and swiftly tackling any emerging undesirable trends.

Friends and stakeholder contract monitoring

3.8 As a direct consequence of its community development commitments, *idverde* has, in conjunction with the borough’s friends groups (via Merton’s Independent Friends Forum), developed a Greenspaces Assessment Form to enable friends and key stakeholder groups to score a range of key site attributes using an overall layperson’s perception to rank the condition of grass, litter, paths, playgrounds, etc.

- 3.9 This project was first implemented in January 2018 and both *idverde* and the Friends Forum have continued to further apply and develop this scheme in partnership since that date.
- 3.10 Further information on the outcomes of this joint-initiative will be outlined by those organisations at this meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

Residents Survey

3.11 The results of the 2019 Merton Residents' Survey revealed the following information in relation to our parks, open spaces and playgrounds:

- % of parks users who rated Merton's parks as very good or good:
81% (*up from 79% in the 2017 Residents Survey*).
- % of young residents who rated Merton's parks as very good or good:
86% (*up from 56% in the 2017 Residents Survey*).

Customer complaints

- 3.12 Residents of the borough are able to submit reports, including service requests and complaints, about grounds maintenance services either by telephone to the Council's Customer Contact Centre or via the Council's online reporting options.
- 3.13 All formal complaints to the Council are channelled through the corporate Customer Complaints team and forwarded to the client-side team or the contractor to consider and respond, as appropriate. (The client-side team principally handles matters of recreational policy and service development, whereas the contractor deals mainly with operational issues such as grass cutting and litter issues).
- 3.14 The Council's Neighbourhood Client Officers are proactive in investigating formal complaints submitted by residents and have monitored known hot-spot locations on a regular basis, over and above the standard PQMS requirements: for example, at Three Kings Pond, Mitcham, where localised anti-social behaviour and street drinking issues generates elevated levels of littering.
- 3.15 Formal customer complaints about relevant Greenspaces operational services recorded by the Council's Customer Complaints team are summarised below. The table includes the equivalent data from the two financial years prior to *idverde's* commencement for comparison purposes.

2015/16*	2016/17*	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 (to end July)
10	12	8	17	7	1

*Years 2015/16 and 2016/17 are prior to *idverde's* commencement.

Green Flag Awards

3.16 *idverde* has proactively supported and directly contributed to the successful retention of the borough's six existing Green Flag Awards, playing a key role in 2018 in securing the very first award for Abbey Recreation Ground. The six parks that have achieved the Green Flag Award standard in Merton are:

- John Innes Park
- Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields
- Colliers Wood Recreation Ground
- South Park Gardens
- Dundonald Recreation Ground
- Abbey Recreation Ground

Allotments, Sport and Cemeteries

3.17 Whereas the allotments service was largely unaffected, the national coronavirus epidemic imposed some quite significant additional demands upon the cemeteries service. Progress with the memorial safety testing measures in cemeteries, for example, was suspended in order to protect this critical service and *idverde's* support and staff re-deployment actions ensured that the increased burial demands at this time were successfully and professionally delivered.

3.18 Organised sport was much affected during the early phase of the coronavirus episode, but has progressively returned, with appropriate measures in place, during the course of this summer. *idverde* continued to maintain and restore our sports facilities throughout lockdown period and so the recovery of sport was not significantly affected by their quality or condition. Casual exercise and recreational use of open spaces increased at this time and a number of indoor activities relocated to our parks.

3.19 The performance and quality standards in respect of these service areas forms part of the PQMS assessment process outlined above.

Events

3.20 *idverde* staff contributed to the successful delivery of some of the borough's major outdoor events during the summers of 2017, 2018 and 2019, including the Mitcham Carnival and the borough's annual public fireworks events, providing both support staff and event equipment and infrastructure as required.

3.21 In addition, *idverde's* grounds staff undertook the site remediation works, in 2017, 2018 and 2019, following the Eastern Electrics Festival in Morden Park and, in 2020, at Wimbledon Park and supported a number of sports-focused tournaments and activities at various locations, the majority during the summer months.

Community development, friends & stakeholder engagement

3.22 *idverde* has invested almost 1,000 staff hours in community development work with parks friends groups and key service stakeholders since the commencement of the Lot 2 contract. More than 100 separate community meetings have been attended in

Merton by *idverde*, including meetings with the Merton Independent Friends Forum, ward members and with representatives of various sports and allotment groups, amongst others. The details, broken down by the relevant years, are provided in the table below.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/22	2020/21 (to end July)	Total to date
Staff hours invested in community development work (Lot 2)	178	260	394	155	984
Number of community meetings attended in Merton	46	30	20	6	102

3.23 A total of 833 volunteer days have been delivered in Merton's parks by *idverde*'s partnership arrangements with the National Probation Service's Community Payback Project Scheme during the course of the contract to date, comprising practical works undertaken at Abbey Recreation Ground, Nelson Gardens, Kendor Gardens and Wimbledon Park.

Special Projects

3.24 Significant parks projects and open space improvements completed within the partnership that have either been delivered directly by or in partnership with *idverde* since 2018 include:

- Design and development of the new Gap Road Pocket Park, Wimbledon.
- Refurbishment of the adventure golf course at Wimbledon Park.
- Development of proposals for a new borough-wide tennis access and membership scheme.
- The introduction of pickleball to the suite of sports services offered within the borough.
- Securing investment in the installation of additional non-turf cricket pitches at 5 sites across the borough.
- Tackling some long-standing issues in relation to waiting-lists on the borough's allotments.
- Roadside bulb planting project on Bushey Road.
- Ground renovations to the main field, Wimbledon Park.
- Supporting the re-establishment of the Friends of Colliers Wood Rec.

4. PERFORMANCE SUMMARY AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 4.1 Overall, *idverde's* performance has, overall, at a PQMS score of 4.84-4.94 annually, been consistently a little under the expectations of the contract specification in relation to the quality and presentation of the borough's green spaces. However, that broad summary data conceals the fact that, for the majority of their tasks, performance has been graded at 5 or above.
- 4.2 Grass cutting and litter standards have generally been the issues that have affected the *idverde's* achievements most of all and will be the focus of both attention and application for both the client and contractor management teams in the short to medium term.
- 4.3 Above all, the contractor needs to anticipate weather-related and seasonal pressure-points and consider how it deploys its staff and other resources when the littering demands are elevated, and also during May and June when grass growth is typically at its peak. The client team is working proactively with the contractor to ensure that performance in these areas is improved. The contractor has already demonstrated a willingness to do so, for example, by organising additional field staff at short notice to deal with greater cleansing needs on warm spring weekends this year.
- 4.4 The contractor has demonstrated commendable commitment to working with local groups and stakeholders during the contract to date, developing their skills and jointly delivering landscape improvement projects, for example. Extending their network of support to further community groups, and re-establishing the momentum previously enjoyed as we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic are evident and mutually-agreed priorities.
- 4.5 The impetus lost directly as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic in other areas service areas - the memorial safety testing programme in cemeteries, for example - will similarly need to be promptly recovered, as both client and contractor already recognise.
- 4.6 Developing community access to and also the range of recreational and health-related activities that outdoor spaces provide is another area for further development, not least because of the invaluable and very much-appreciated opportunities offered by our parks, a need that was very evident during the early weeks of lockdown when many other community and recreational facilities were closed.
- 4.7 In order to improve the delivery of the grounds maintenance service and also to increase confidence that the contract is maintaining the expected performance and quality standards, the Lot 2 client team will, furthermore, soon be reconfigured via a divisional restructure that includes the Greenspaces client team and the Neighbourhood Client Officers, with the aim to further improve contract monitoring, management outcomes and data-gathering.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1. This report is an update on the performance of the Council's current grounds maintenance service provider, *idverde*, and therefore no alternatives have been considered.

6. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

6.1 No specific consultation has contributed to the compilation of this report, however, the Greenspaces team has recently commissioned a borough-wide and broad public consultation on its parks service, the findings of which will inform the future development and improvement of the service, including those services delivered by *idverde*.

7. TIMETABLE

7.1 This report is an update on the performance of the Council's current grounds maintenance service provider, *idverde*, which considers the first 3.5 years of their long-term contact with the authority.

8. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 As at Period four (July) a related overspend of £29k is being forecast, which assumes that an expected contractual cemetery revenue share for 2018/19 and 2019/20 of £157k will be received. However, in tandem with the Phase C Waste Services (Lot 1) Annual Review process, a similar process is nearing completion regarding the grounds maintenance contract (Lot 2), which could affect this revenue share and, therefore, the forecast.

9. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None for the purposes of this report.

10. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no specific human rights, equalities or community cohesion implications arising from this report.

11. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no specific risk management or health and safety implications arising from this report.

13. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix 1 - PQMS Grading.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 Minutes of Cabinet, Monday 6 June 2016.

14.2 Minutes of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Thursday 9 June 2016.

14.3 Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Tuesday 2 August 2016.

14.4 Minutes of Council, Wednesday 14 September 2016.

14.5 Minutes of Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Wednesday 15 March 2017.

14.6 Minutes of Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Thursday 2 November 2017.

14.7 Minutes of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting, Thursday 21 June 2018.

14.8 Minutes of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting, Thursday 1 November 2018.

14.9 London Borough of Merton Residents Survey 2019, June 2019.

APPENDIX 1 - PQMS GRADING

[OFFICIAL]		<h1>PQMS Grading</h1>
Aim: The use of a performance management system which provides the council and the contractor with an overall assessment of the contractor's performance. It will be assessed across the full range of features within the contract specification.		
Classification of Standards: For the council to achieve a standard overall, all of the criteria within that standard must have been met or exceeded.		
A	7	GM: Feature is maintained above contract standard in all aspects (Grade A will not be achieved in most circumstances) SC: Absence of all litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall, weeds etc. FM: Absence of all dirt, waste, cobwebs, dead insects/vermin and the facility or area is fully stocked CE: All clear no litter/debris in channel or against grille, no overhanging vegetation.
A-	6	GM: Feature is maintained above contract standard in most aspects. (Grade A- will not be achieved in most circumstances) SC: Absence of almost all litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall etc. Substantially weed free FM: Absence of almost all dirt, waste, cobwebs, dead insects/vermin and the facility or area is fully stocked CE: Minor debris, recent deposits with no compromise in efficiency.
B	5	GM: Feature is maintained to contract standard in all aspects SC: Predominately free of litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall etc. Predominantly weed free FM: Predominately free of all dirt, waste, cobwebs, dead insects or vermin and the facility or area is fully stocked CE: Minor debris, slight effect on efficiency.
B-	4	GM: The feature is maintained to contract standard in the majority of aspects SC: Some distribution of litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall, etc. Some weed growth FM: Some distribution of dirt, waste, cobwebs, dead insects or vermin and the facility or area is adequately stocked. CE: Moderate debris, still working effectively
C	3	GM: The feature is maintained slightly below contract standard in some aspects SC: Widespread distribution of litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall etc. Significant weed growth FM: Widespread distribution of dirt, waste, cobwebs, dead insects /vermin and the facility or area is inadequately stocked CE: Moderate debris, efficiency compromised.
C-	2	GM: The feature is maintained but below contract standard in most aspects SC: Widespread distribution and accumulation of litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall etc. Considerable weed growth FM: Widespread distribution and accumulation of dirt,waste,cobwebs,dead insects or vermin and the facility or area is inadequately stocked CE: Chocked and ineffective
D	1	GM: The feature is unmaintained and considerably below contract standard in all aspect SC: Heavy distribution of litter, detritus, excreta, leaf fall etc. Heavy, widespread weed growth. FM: Heavy distribution of dirt, waste, cobwebs, dead insects or vermin and the facility or area is inadequately stocked CE: Channel/grille in filled and unidentifiable

[OFFICIAL]